



Meteor



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Around USAG Benelux

USAG Benelux



PHOTO: Spec. Rebecca Jones

Remembering!

One candle illuminates a table set up to honor four service members; a Soldier, Sailor, Airman and Marine at the 231st Army Birthday celebration hosted by the U.S. Army Garrison Benelux June 24, at the SHAPE Club. The table served as a tribute to the fallen comrades who gave their all for their country.

USAG Brussels



PHOTO: Thad Moyseowicz

July 4th Celebration!

Rik Bertrand, master of ceremonies for U.S. Army Garrison Brussels Independence Day celebration (a.k.a. "Uncle Sam") does an Independence Day dance with his daughter, Yannah, July 1, during July 4th festivities at Brussels American School. Yannah asked her father and "famous Uncle" to dance!

Celebrating 230 years of American Independence



PHOTO: Thad Moyseowicz

A Belgian Federal Police Mounted Color Guard and a Brussels Joint Service Color Guard provide pageantry during the opening ceremony of U.S. Army Garrison Brussels' Independence Day celebration, July 1, at Brussels American School. This year marks the 230th anniversary of American Independence.

Trucks get dramatic new life *Mechanic stretches garrison dollars*

Story and photos by J.D. Hardesty
Meteor-Heraut Editor

Money is tight; a rhetorical understatement for all U.S. Army garrisons faced with shrinking operating dollars while trying to provide the best quality of life support for its Soldiers, civilians and their families.

Fiscal shortfalls across the Army entering the fourth-quarter are evidenced by temporary and term employment being slashed and civilian hiring freezes as dollars are directed to war-fighting assets.

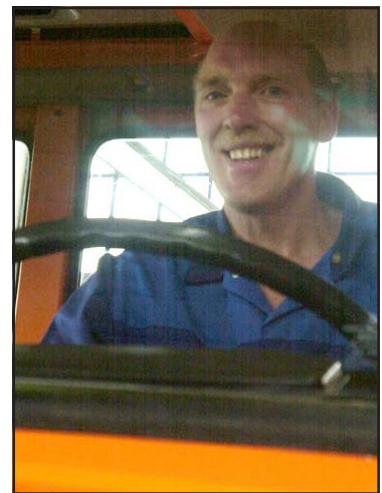
The money crunch has garrison commanders looking for innovative ways to

stretch their limited funds as they find new ways to do more with less.

In the U.S. Army Garrison Benelux, the directorates of Public Works and Logistics are investing what few dollars they have into a vehicle reconditioning program that should provide a windfall for over the next decade.

DPW and DOL leaders are banking on the mechanical expertise of Patrick Rocher, an automotive/auto body mechanic who has worked for the garrison for more than 24 years.

See Reconditioning, page 2



Patrick Rocher

Auto Mechanic Extraordinaire

USAG Benelux celebrates Army's Birthday

PHOTO: Spec. Rebecca Jones



Soldiers, civilians and family members from across the U.S. Army Garrison Benelux celebrated the 231st U.S. Army Birthday June 24 at the SHAPE Club. Brig. Gen. Russel L. Frutiger, deputy chief of staff, G-1, U.S. Army, Europe and Seventh Army and guest speaker for the event, presented an overview of the honor and heritage Soldiers have displayed while serving in the Benelux. He expressed accolades to today's servicemembers supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom and the Global War on Terrorism.



Col. Dean A. Nowowiejski
USAG Benelux Commander

Two highlights for this edition of the Meteor-Heraut: good information for Newcomers and the Interactive Customer Evaluation system (ICE). They both fit this time of year.

Newcomer's Highlights

By now, several of the families that are joining our American communities across the Benelux have arrived. Many are in the hunt for that perfect leased property with the right amount of space and sustainable commute. Best wishes for good hunting!

Don't forget that your local news

Nowowiejski Notes

comes over our AFN affiliate, "The Voice of the Benelux," AFN SHAPE, with local broadcasts at most communities and a local news archive available on the web at afneurope.net. There is a link to the "Benelux Today" radio archive at www.usagbenelux.eur.army.mil at the AFN SHAPE button. If you want the latest, this is the best place to hear it.

You will want a copy of The Best of the Benelux, available in hard copy for the first time this summer. You can pick them up at Army Community Services or the Inprocessing centers. It's full of practical information for the newcomer.

We also encourage you to attend a Welcome Everyone to Belgium and Headstart class available from ACS and your local Education Center.

For more information on "Welcome to Belgium," check the lobby of the Hotel Maisières or call 065-32-6252.

Whether French or Dutch are the most useful languages where you live, you can get Headstart classes from your Education Center.

Frankly, these classes are under-

subscribed and difficult to resource right now.

We need you to participate. What it means when a Headstart class is empty is that you are going to go through your tour unarmed with host nation language capabilities that will make you at home as a guest in Belgium or The Netherlands, and equip you to ride the train, order a meal, and understand some essentials about your host nation's culture.

These classes are so important that they ought to be mandatory. They are well worth the time investment.

A few other quick reminders. We have Morale, Welfare and Recreation trips to help you learn about the region.

There are recycling centers to support you at both Chièvres and Schinnen. Chièvres has a pet boarding kennel for those PCS moves and weekend trips.

If you are new to the military, we encourage American Forces Team Building classes, free of charge. If you are a sponsor, ACS provides sponsor training classes the first Wednesday

of the month from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. at the ACS conference room, Bldg. 318. Additional information is available by accessing the USAG Benelux website at www.usagbenelux.eur.army.mil, click on Services, then Community Services, then ACS and Relocation, or call ACS at 065-44-4332 or DSN 423-4332.

Interactive Customer Service

Finally, a word about customer service. We need your feedback. If you have an idea about how a community service could be improved, or wish to provide feedback on a good job performed, the Interactive Customer Evaluation form is for you.

ICE is the standard for customer feedback in USAG Benelux. I ask that you use it exclusively. Our web pages contain links, or you can access it directly from ice.disa.mil.

This automated feedback system contains leader tools that make it worth your while to take the minute to find the activity you want to comment on. Just be a little persistent and do it.

We want to be the leading community in Europe for receiving your comments. ICE is the way. Good or bad, or just good ideas, we need to hear from you.

Reconditioning...from page 1

Rocher not only stretches fiscal dollars, he extends the life expectancy of an aging fleet of maintenance trucks "not scheduled to be replaced anytime soon," said Chuck Mielnicki, a DOL maintenance officer with 34 years of federal service.

The Department of Defense announced June 26; the cost of replacing, repairing and upgrading Army equipment in Iraq and Afghanistan is expected to triple next year to more than \$17 billion.

Equipment costs are skyrocketing. "That's why we are investing in a recondition program," Mielnicki said.

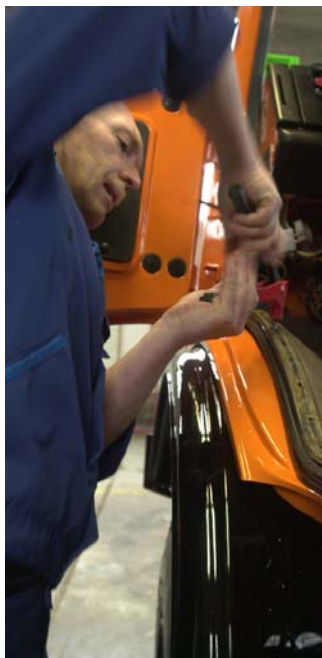
According to Mielnicki, a total of 11 special purpose vehicles, flat beds and dump trucks are being refurbished by Rocher.

"The normal life expectancy for the equipment some of which is used to haul and salt roads in the winter and other maintenance chores is 15 to 20 years," he said. "Patrick's work adds at least 10 more years of life to every truck."

The savings - over time - are enormous. Some estimates top \$400,000, while conservative estimates reflect \$300,000.

Mielnicki estimates the garrison will save more than \$300,000 over the next decade because of Rocher's work.

Rocher was putting the finishing touches on the second refurbished vehicle, an orange



(Left) Patrick Rocher rivets weatherstripping in the door jam of the Mercedes Unimog 1000 truck he refurbished. The entire project could save the U.S. Army Garrison Benelux more than \$300,000 over the equipments projected lifetime. (Right) Rocher finished refurbishing the 1987 Mercedes Unimog 100, the second of 11 scheduled garrison vehicles he is completely overhauling to add 10 to 15 years new life into the equipment.

and black 1987 Mercedes Unimog 100 with an original price tag estimated at \$48,000.

"The same vehicle lists for more than \$75,000 now," Mielnicki said.

To replace the 11 aging maintenance trucks that are nearing their life expectancy would cost the garrison \$825,000.

With \$30,000 seed money for parts and paint, Rocher tears down and rebuilds the trucks from the ground up.

Mielnicki refers to Rocher as "the Maintenance Division's

auto mechanic extraordinaire."

It's estimated his work saved enough garrison dollars to pay his salary for the next 10 years.

He said, "Patrick uses about 350 man-hours per vehicle to go through the engine, transmission and diagnostics, he even manufactures some parts when they are not available.

"He fabricates what we can't buy," he said.

Rocher strips the entire truck into pieces spread across the shop floor, keeps before and after photos with each album

accompanied by his smile as he shows the steps of how each vehicle "is made nearly new."

Some parts have to be sent out to be sandblasted, others are cleaned, scrubbed or "Rocher fabricated" if they are in disrepair or because of budget constraints.

Rocher explained he "fabricated the entire truck bed, fenders, bumper, grill, fender wells and replaced the flooring on the 1987 Mercedes Unimog" as he wrenched and riveted the finishing touches before placing

the truck back in service.

"I had to go through clean, refurbish or fabricate the electric, air and hydraulic systems," he said.

He reassembled the newly painted Mercedes truck bolt by bolt, rivet by rivet from the wheels up.

"I'm lucky to be working for the DOL Maintenance Division," he said in his native French. "Management approves of the way I want to work and I like the challenge of refurbishing these vehicles.

Brother, sister recall war separation, strife, reunion

By Tom Larscheid

Guest Columnist

Virtually millions of families in the Benelux were swept up by the events of World War II. Everyone suffered in some way under the cruel Nazi jackboot of occupation. For four long years families endured separation, food shortages, forced labor and possible arrest. Death was a constant companion.

The following is but one example of a family torn apart by war, and, by nothing short of a miracle, survived.

Elly De Lathouwer's vague memories as a child during World War II includes fighting with another child in 1944 over a hand grenade left behind by retreating German soldiers. To this day she doesn't know what attracted her to that deadly piece of war detritus.

"I just wanted it," she recalled recently. "I suppose it looked like a toy and that's why I thought it was ok to play with." (Editor's Note: The German stick grenade looked very similar to a common kitchen utensil, the potato masher.)

During that same time period, hundreds of miles away in Berlin, Germany, her older brother, Rodgers, spent his days dodging German police patrols and watching Allied bombs rain down on the dying Nazi capital. He claims neither the hundreds of tons of bombs dropped on the city came close to him nor the machine gun and small arms fire that zinged and ricocheted down the streets during the final battle of April 1945.

"I was never scared," he said. "During the heavy bombings of Berlin I was often outside on the roof looking up with my father. He was rather fatalistic: 'If I die, I die. I can die on the roof or in the bomb shelter. What difference does it make?' he used to say. Even at the end of the war when the Russians came in, I was out on the streets looking for something to eat. Teenagers have no fear."

Before the war, the De Lathouwer family lived peacefully on the left bank of the Shelled River in Antwerp where their father, John, worked as a clerk for a German shipping firm. With war clouds forming in 1939, John was drafted into the Belgian army.

"The gas and electricity was cut in May 1940," Rodgers said. "We heard on the radio the Germans were bombing Belgium and invading. The Belgian army lasted 18 days and surrendered. My father became a prisoner of war."

After six months John was released and came home pale and thin with no job prospects.

"The Germans 'offered' him a similar job he had before but it was in Berlin," Rodgers recounted. "He was forced to go. After a few months my mother decided to go to him but didn't know what to do about us. I wanted to go but Elly was too small. My mother argued with her mother and she finally convinced mom to leave Elly here. It was too dangerous to take a small child to Germany."

Elly was taken to a small village where she was raised by a friend of the family.

"When my real mother came to take me away after the war, I didn't want to go. She was a stranger to me," Elly said. "I always asked for my brother because I remembered him protecting me. My parents I didn't know and it took time to get used to us as a family again."

As the German army retreated from the Benelux in the fall of 1944, Elly recalled exhausted soldiers taking over their home and barn to sleep.

"They were all over the floor in the house and outside on the grass, that I remember," Elly said. "My adoptive mother told me how an older German soldier put me on his lap and held me tightly while he cried and cried. I suppose I reminded him of a child he had at home but realized he would never live to see again."

In Berlin, where Rodgers worked in a restaurant kitchen with his mother, they found themselves spending more

and more time in bomb shelters.

"In the last three months of the war the bombings were very heavy. The Americans came during the day, the British in the evening and the Russians at night," Rodgers said. "But our house was never hit."

Although Rodgers avoided police and army patrols in the burning city, he was summoned by mail to report for army duty as the Nazis impressed all able-bodied men into the final defense of Berlin. Refusal meant the firing squad.

"I never did go," Rodgers said. "I always had to be on my guard. I was on the streets with German kids looting whatever we could find from abandoned shops."

After Berlin fell to the Red Army in April 1945, the De Lathouwer family joined millions of displaced persons. They sewed small Belgian flags on their clothing so the Russians would know they were not German.

"My father asked a Soviet officer if he spoke French and the man, who was a marine officer, told my father he had been to Antwerp several times before the war. He scrawled a few words on a piece of paper and told my dad to show it if we were ever stopped by a patrol," Rodgers said. "That little piece of paper saved us more than once."

Loading up what little possessions they had on a small wagon, the family began their long trip back to Belgium and little Elly.

"On the way we passed a deserted army camp where we slept for a night," Rodgers said. "I looked in all the rooms for something usable and found a big typewriter. Since my dad was a clerk he loaded up the typewriter and lugged it back to Belgium. He used the typewriter for years and I did too until 10 years ago. Ribbons are hard to find today."

After a stint in the Belgian army, Rodgers formed an act with Elly, assisting her in ballet and acrobatics. The duo hit the road in 1950 performing in theaters in the Benelux and France for more than a decade after the war.



PHOTO: Tom Larscheid

Rogers De Lathouwer sits with the typewriter he found in a deserted army camp when his family returned from Berlin to Belgium in 1945.

About the Meteor-Heraut

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- We reserve the right to edit all material for style, to fit available space, to resolve libel, safety or force protection issues and to correct grammar.
- Submit articles in plain text and separate photographic files, but publication depends upon the judgment of the editor.
- Event announcements must use civilian dates and times. Spell out acronyms and include a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address. We cannot reproduce prepared flyers in the *Meteor-Heraut*.

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Chièvres Garrison...serving SHAPE/Chièvres communities

Community Notes

Students 'check-out' Chièvres Library

SHAPE school year may have ended but student learning continues as more than 40 children have registered for the library's summer reading program, according to librarian, Carol Wittig.

Additionally, nearly 200 patrons visited the library June 28, "a new record," according to Wittig.

Chièvres Library summer reading program "Paws, Claws, Scales and Tales" started June 27 and runs through Aug. 8.

The program, available to U.S., and Canadian ID cardholders, is for children up to 12 years of age. For more information, call 361-5767.

Family Life Center moves to new location

The U.S. Army Garrison Benelux chaplaincy announced June 30, the Family Life Center moved to a new location.

The center, which offers pastoral counseling to American Forces members, their families and Department of Defense civilians and their families, moved to Building 13 on Caserne Daumerie.

The center offers marriage, family and individual counseling, as well as pre-marital training, stress management training, marriage enrichment and parenting seminars.

For more information, call 361-6021 or 068-27-6021.

Headstart Class begins July 10

The Benelux Headstart Class, a five-day class featuring french language familiarization, host nation culture, customs begins July 10 at 8:30 a.m. at the U.S. Army Garrison Benelux Education Center, Building No. 212 on SHAPE.

The classes are designed to help newcomers easily adapt to Belgium and the SHAPE area.

Headstart teaches newcomers how to speak enough French to survive when shopping and dining on the economy. It also covers Belgian life and culture and provides a question and answer session to help newcomers assimilate in their new surroundings.

Instructions on how to "Take the Train" is an optional class scheduled for July 15 at 9 a.m.

For more Headstart Class information, call the USAG Benelux Education Center at DSN: 423-3466.

Contact Army Community Services at DSN: 423-5777 to register for the "Take the Train" class.

Summer backyard outings

Discover what local communities offer

By Cis Spook

Chièvres Garrison Public Affairs Officer

Summer is here and with it comes the time to enjoy outings. Although the Chièvres Garrison is centrally located to travel to Amsterdam or Paris, the local community has also lots to offer. Here are some ideas of what is going on in the local community this summer:

Chièvres Air Base International Museum This museum located on Rue de St Ghislain, 16, retraces the history of the air base since 1917 when the first aircraft, a German Albatrox C1, landed on a grassy area on base. The museum is open every Saturday and Sunday from April until October from 2 p.m. 5 p.m. Entrance fee is 2.50 euros per adult.



Château d'Attre

Château d'Attre From April until October, this château opens its doors every Sunday and Belgian holiday from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. Not only can you visit the 18th century château but also its picturesque garden with the rocky tower. Entrance fee is 5.50 euros per adult. An English guided tour is available.

Château de Beloeil - This vast stately home of the Princes de Ligne used to be a medieval fortress. Over the course of eight centuries it has been transformed into a château. The 20,000 books in its library show how printing developed from its origins to the present days. The furniture is a selection of the work of the finest French cabinet makers of the 17th and 18th Century. The paintings depict most members of the family who occupied the premises and record important events of their lives. The château can be visited every day between mid May and until mid September from 1 until 8 p.m. Entrance fee is 5 euros per adult.

Hôpital Notre-Dame à la Rose The Hospital Our Lady of the Rose on Place Alix de Rosoit at Lessines (20 minutes from Ath) was founded in 1242 and is one of the last examples of a complete autarkic hospital site, evidence of the way in which hospitals operated in the Middle Ages. The hospital is open daily during July and August. The guided tour is at 3 p.m.

Parc Paradisio at Cambron Casteau (Brugelette) Watch the demonstration of birds of prey, walk through the aviary to admire less known bird species, enjoy and relax in the well maintained gardens, watch the sea lions and penguins at Algoa bay or visit the sub tropical greenhouse with luxurious vegetation and exotic animals,... It is all possible at Parc Paradisio. Parc Paradisio is open during July and August from 10 a.m. until 7 p.m., and from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m., from Sept. 1 until Nov. 5. Entrance fee is 18.50 euros per adult, 13.50 euros for children aged three up to 11 years and free for children under three. *Residents of Brugelette (to include Cambron Casteau, Attre, Gages and Mévergnies) get free access to the park provided they can show an official (Belgian) document that proves their residency.*

Jazz Cruise On board the "Come in Europe," you will enjoy a three-hour cruise to the rhythm of a jazz orchestra. Departure is at the bridge in Antoing (South East from Tournai) at 7:20 p.m. Return is approximately at 11 p.m. Fee is 17 euros. Reservations are mandatory at 069/446800 or 0479471818.

Musical Night at the Beloeil Château is scheduled for Aug. 12, from 6 p.m. until midnight. For the 17th time, the castle of Beloeil opens its doors for this classical music event that perfectly matches with the site.

This year, some 300 artists will perform within the musical universe of the famous composer Georg Friedrich Haendel. Born in 1685, Haendel is a British composer of German origin of the late baroque era.

Spectators will have the opportunity to walk through the park of the castle going from one of the 12 scenes to the other. Soloists, comedians, choirs, pianists, orchestras, quartets and more will perform their music in perfect harmony with the charm of the site while highlighting the significant events in Haendel's life. At about 11 p.m., all spectators will assemble near the lake for the final fireworks. It is recommended to purchase your ticket ahead of time as this event quickly sells out. Tickets are at 28 euros per person and can be purchased at the Beloeil tourist office on Rue du Château 27, at Beloeil. For more infor-

mation, call the tourist office at 069/689516.

Ath Giants' Festival - The city of Ath will celebrate its traditional and folkloric event the "Ducasse," Aug. 25-27. The event is now part of the United



The Giants of Ath

Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. On Friday, Aug. 25, starting at 10 p.m., is the traditional burning of Giant Goliath's pants prior to his marriage. The wedding will be celebrated on Saturday at 3 p.m. at the Saint Julien Church. Following the wedding is the fight between Goliath and the shepherd David in front of the city hall. David needs to throw a ball into the hole through which the carriers of the giant Goliath can see. On Sunday is the procession through the streets of Ath starting at 10 a.m., from the train station and in the afternoon from the "Esplanade". If you don't like crowds, it is recommended to go and watch the morning procession.



Tanks in Town

Tanks in Town This annual gathering of vintage tanks and vehicles will take place on Aug. 26, 27. On Saturday is the display of the vehicles at the Bois-Brûlé at Ghlin with the possibility to ride on one of the tanks. On Sunday, all vintage tanks and vehicles will be part of a convoy through the streets of Mons departing at 9 a.m., from the Bois-Brûlé at Ghlin and arriving on the Mons main square at approximately 5 p.m. Entrance to the Bois-Brûlé site at Ghlin is free of charge for all military ID cardholders.

USAG Schinnen...serving the tri-border community

Belgian WWII association keeps U.S. Soldiers memory alive



PHOTO: Capt. Erwin Peters

U.S. Army Garrison Benelux representative, U.S. Army Lt. Col. (Ret) Jon Davis (Right) and Hell on Wheels Belgium Chapter president Ludo Dobbaertsit, prepare to lay flowers at the 2nd Armored Division Memorial of fallen WWII Soldiers. Dobbaertsit proudly wears his replica WWII American Soldiers uniform during the memorial service.

By LaDonna Davis

Schinnen Public Affairs Office

The Belgian World War II military and veterans association, "Hell on Wheels", celebrated their 30th anniversary during an annual three-day jamboree and wreath-laying ceremony June 23-25 in Zutendaal, Belgium.

The Hells on Wheels Association is named after the U.S. 2nd Armored Division that participated in the liberation of Belgium and other European countries during WWII.

Each year, the association's members invite WWII commemorative associations from all over Northwestern Eu-

rope for a large gathering where enthusiasts get a chance to show off their authentic WWII military vehicles and memorabilia, lay wreaths in honor and remembrance of fallen allied Soldiers, and "camp out" much like the Soldiers in WWII did.

"We do this event each year to keep the memory of the WWII veterans alive and to make sure we keep the cars running," said Capt. Erwin Peters, a Hell on Wheels club organizer.

Twenty-two WWII associations participated in this year's event and more than 1,500 people attended the celebration over the three-day period, including U.S. Army Garrison Benelux representative Army Lt. Col. (Ret.) Jon Davis.

"The 2nd Armored Division is a U.S. unit and I thought it would be an honor if we had a U.S. representative present to participate in the laying of the wreath," said Peters.

"It's amazing to think about the fact that the war has been over for more than 60 years and that our host nation friends so passionately dedicate so much of their time, and their money in honoring and perpetuating the memory of American Soldiers, most of whom they never knew, who fought throughout this area 60 years ago," said Davis. "To me this living tribute to the legacy of the 2nd AD is simply remarkable."

See 2nd Armored Division, page 7

Summertime brings 'old' Limburg tradition

By Rita Hoefnagels

Schinnen Public Affairs Office

Each summer in the Limburg provinces, announcements for "Schutters' feesten" (shooting fest) are posted everywhere.

The fests, which consists of men and women from various shooting clubs (Schutterijen) participating in large parades and shooting at a stationary target, have become a popular tradition in the Limburg villages, small towns and rural communities.

Opinions about the history of the clubs differ greatly.

The clubs are very proud of their respectable origin because for many years it was believed that "Schutterij" had been established to protect church and state from all kind of calamities. However, as we know now, many honorable reasons played a role in the establishment of the shooters clubs, but protective tasks were never the sole or primary reason.

Old documents tell us shooters very seldom used their rifles for security or safety reasons and so far there is no knowledge of glorious achievements.

The so-called "protection theory" is probably based on a number of misconceptions resulting from an inaccurate knowledge of general history.

Most of the shooting clubs were established in the 16th and 17th centuries.

This was quite a turbulent time with political, religious, economical and social problems - all influencing the development of the shooting clubs - but the primary purpose of establishing the clubs was to offer a safe social setting to

boost moral for the town's people during a time of great depression and to bring about a sense of brotherhood and safety throughout the community.

It wasn't until later that the clubs became a valuable pro-

See Shooters club, page 7



PHOTO: Henri Saive

The Schinnen Shooters Club proudly displays their uniform and guns to the public during their 2006 shooting fest parade.

Gas, electric

Customers get choice

By LaDonna Davis

Schinnen Public Affairs Office

Service members, civilians, and their families at U.S. Army Garrison Schinnen now have the option of choosing an electric and gas company due to the Dutch government privatizing the energy market.

In the past, the Dutch government owned the electrical company, Essent, making it the only company customers, Dutch or military, could use for their energy needs.

Last year, the government opened the market to all electric companies, allowing customers to weigh the benefits of various energy companies, and choose the one they feel suits them the best.

"The free market benefits the people of Schinnen because there are energy companies out there with lower prices due to competition," said Cyril Van der Veerdronk, a Schinnen housing referral officer. "In the past, there were no options, now people have a choice."

In March, the housing office took into consideration the various energy companies on the market and graded them based on best product, pricing, and American friendliness. Through strategic planning, the housing office was able to choose an electric company that they felt would meet the needs of the service members, families and civilians on base.

Now, customers can choose between Rendo and Essent for their electricity and gas needs.

"Our job in the housing office is not to tell the customers which company to go to or which company is the best," said Veerdronk. "If they want to go with Essent, then we'll work with Essent, if they want to go with Rendo, then we'll work with Rendo. We just want to give them the option of choosing a company that's best for them."

Though the housing office has researched Rendo extensively, Veerdronk says it's still in the testing phase for customer satisfaction. "The big test will be in a year or two when people start deploying or leaving."

But, for now, Veerdronk says, having a choice in energy companies will only benefit the people stationed here. "Both energy companies are American friendly and we have experience working with each of them, the choice is up to the customer."

USAG Brussels...serving the tri-mission community

Vietnam era veteran shares lessons *Former Prisoner of War talks to Brussels Soldiers*

By Thad Moyseowicz

Brussels Public Affairs Officer

Nearly 39 years after it happened, retired Navy Captain J. "Mike" McGrath can still recall with perfect clarity the day in June, 1967 when he flew his 178th and final mission over North Vietnam.

He had taken off from USS Constellation in the South China Sea, had already attacked one target and was rolling in on a second target when he heard an explosion and simultaneously lost control of his A-4 "Skyhawk" aircraft.

"One wing was gone, and I started to roll uncontrollably toward the ground," McGrath recalls. "Because of the g-forces, I was unable to pull the ejection handle above my head. I was barely able to initiate ejection with the underseat handle."

Because of his aircraft's rolling attitude, McGrath sustained several serious injuries during his ejection because of the aircraft's rolling altitude, including a dislocated, fractured left arm, two fractured vertebrae and a fractured left knee. But successfully eject he did.

And that's when his problems started.

McGrath, who retired from the Navy in 1987 and has since retired from a second career as a commercial airline pilot, recounted his Prisoner of War experiences before a rapt group of U.S. Army Garrison Brussels Soldiers.

Some of Soldiers had seen him on a "Code of Con-



PHOTO: Thad McGrath

Retired Navy Capt. J. "Mike" McGrath, a former prisoner of war held in North Vietnam's infamous "Hanoi Hilton" discusses with U.S. Army Garrison Brussels Soldiers how the military's Code of Conduct helped him survive through numerous enemy "interrogations" during his six-year captivity.

duct" Armed Forces Network (AFN) broadcast spot that is still periodically broadcast in Europe.

McGrath, who lives in Colorado, was visiting friends in Brussels and agreed to speak to the garrison's Soldiers- "that is, if they're interested in listening to an old codger like me!"

According to McGrath, North Vietnamese peasants and militiamen were almost immediately upon him

during this period. McGrath explains he was lying on the floor of his cell when he became conscious of a tapping noise. "It was a rhythm familiar to any American - the opening beats of "Shave and a Haircut."

"Despite my mental haze, I responded with the answering "two bits" knocks, he says. "There was then a torrent of taps which I was unable to understand."

See McGrath, page 7

Consignment shop recycles community goods

By Thad Moyseowicz

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The USAG Brussels Consignment Shop is one of those "unsung" entities that provide a special "value-added" service to the Brussels Community.

Consignment Shop Board President Beth Bottesini explained some of the services it provides:

"First and foremost, we provide a centrally-located venue for community members to dispose of unwanted 'treasures' for cash. Given the dispersal of our community throughout Brussels, it's convenient for both consignors and buyers.

"Second, there's a de facto quality cut. Since items must be physically brought to the shop by consignors, there's a built-in incentive to not bring "junk" that might otherwise show up at a yard sale.

"Third, the shop's profits are plowed right back into the community!

"Finally, we allow our patrons to 'recycle' high-demand items, such as 220V appliances and fans," she said.

The Consignment Shop is open Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday from 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and Thursdays from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Chris Ray, the spouse of a tri-missions employee, manages the day-to-day operations

Bottesini points out that the Consignment Shop is quintessential volunteer work. "We have seven community members in our pool of store operators and we're always looking for more. Optimally, we have three people in the store at any one time, but we get by with two."

Consignors may bring up to 15 items per day (of which up to five can be clothing), along with a simple form. The consignors price their items, the staff logs them in and the items go on display in the store (located on the top floor of Building No. 1). The transaction is handled by the staff. The shop charges a 25 percent commission for its services.

"If business is gauged by profits, Bottesini says, "In 2005, after deducting



PHOTO: Thad Moyseowicz

Brussels Consignment Shop volunteers (l to r) Robyn Longworth, Beth Bottesini, Chris Ray provide the community with a "win-win" value-added service as families recycle and resell products at the store.

operating expenses, we gave \$6,800 back in scholarships for Brussels youth and to our Directorate of Morale, Welfare and Recreation. That's not a bad figure, given that it represents only 25 percent of our intake."

Bottesini credits Ray and the other shop volunteers with "bringing the shop into the 21st Century. We've tried hard to change the image of the store from being basically a junk shop to one that offers quality consigned goods at bargain prices. We employ e-mail and maintain computerized 'shoppers' lists' to assist bargain shoppers. Sales are up 29 percent this calendar year."



USAG Brussels meets high-visibility mission

PHOTO: Thad Moyseowicz

U.S. Army Garrison Brussels Soldiers and civilian employees pose with Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld June 8, at the conclusion of the NATO Defense Ministerial meeting. In addition to providing standard garrison operations to Soldiers, civilian employees and their families in the Brussels area, the USAG Benelux's subordinate garrison provides support to distinguished visitors, cabinet-level ministerial diplomats and other American dignitaries.

McGrath...from page 6

This was of huge significance, explains McGrath. "Although I was still drifting in and out of consciousness, I knew that I was not alone - that there was a fellow American in the cell next to mine. This gave me a huge moral boost."

The second thing that happened was that McGrath eventually started to provide his captors with "information."

McGrath says, "Everybody, repeat, everybody has a limit to the amount of torture he or she can bear. The stuff you see in the movies is just that."

So McGrath began to provide "misinformation" that sounded plausible.

"My interrogators knew I'd flown off an aircraft carrier. They asked me, in all seriousness, where on a carrier we kept the pigs and goats. I answered them that they were kept in the after section of the ship."

Having improvised, McGrath had to embellish the story.

"When they asked me why, I was inspired to say that it was because if an aircraft crashed on landing, only livestock would be killed," he says.

McGrath was able to keep his stories straight, feeding his captors just enough misinformation to appear to be cooperating. The ultimate goal of his interrogators was to make him sign a confession and otherwise denounce the United States. "I'm happy to say that I never did that," he says.

McGrath described to his Brussels audience how the remainder of his six years in captivity went.

Inmates were never immune from torture, although it became less "concentrated." Once his captors were through with the interrogation phase, he was returned to his cell and began to physically get better. Within a month he was able to stand up.

Still denied medical treatment, he describes how he re-set his own dislocated elbow by hanging by that arm from his cell window and allowing body weight to do the rest.

"The pain of the cure was unbearable," he says, "But well worth it."

Once fully conscious, he started to communicate with his neighbor by using the laborious "tap" code. He was taught hundreds of names of other POWs, which he committed to memory.

The Brussels Soldiers were impressed with his recall as he rattled off the names alphabetically. Despite malnutrition and periodic bouts of dysentery (he lost 50 pounds during his six years of captivity), his body gradually healed.

He started exercising, reaching the point where he could do a prodigious number of sit-ups and finger push-ups.

Eventually, he was released from solitary confinement (he believes this was not a reward, but a consequence of the

fact that the POW population started to swell and the North Vietnamese were running out of space). It was a joy to be able to be with his fellow PoWs.

"Besides exercising our bodies, we went out of our way to exercise our minds in any way possible. A prisoner who spoke German taught his cellmates the language. Another who was a math whiz would teach math," he says.

Already confined for three years, McGrath credits the U.S. Army with a turning point in his and his fellow prisoners' lives.

"What we now call the 'Son Tay' raid happened in late 1970," he explains. "A specially trained Army unit launched a helicopter-borne assault on the Son Tay POW camp deep in North Vietnam."

"Unfortunately for the raiders, the North Vietnamese had emptied the camp literally days prior to the operation," he says. "Naturally, the North Vietnamese didn't tell us what had happened, but, within a couple of months, we were able to infer from their sudden concentration of us into one camp that a rescue attempt had been made."

"Our inferences were confirmed by newly shot down prisoners," he says. "The news was a terrific boost to our morale. Although the operation was not a success, to this day, our association of former Vietnam POWs is very close to the remaining Son Tay raiders."

They're heroes in our book!"

McGrath and his fellow prisoners were released in March, 1973 and finally went home to their families to try and re-start their lives. "My sons were 3 and 2 years old when I was shot down," he says. "I bought a trailer, my wife Marlene and I took them out of school and we spent eight months traveling the country to re-establish our family unit."

We're still very close."

What advice does McGrath offer to Brussels Soldiers?

"First and foremost, each and every one of you can do what I did," he says. "Each and every one of you can put up with the beatings, with the isolation, with the illness and deprivation, with all of the ill-treatment I've described. I'm not special."

McGrath suggests that each of us build and then carry around with ourselves what he calls "your own invisible ball of faith." The ball consists of faith in "your religion, your country, your family, your unit, your classmates and friends."

When facing adversity, McGrath says to "dig your fingers into that ball. Don't let go of it. It'll sustain you." McGrath did not know that he already possessed a small "faith ball" when he was shot down. He added to it during his captivity. "My advice is to work on that ball before you face adversity," he says.

2nd Armored Division...from page 5

In 1976, the Hell on Wheels association formed with the mission to inform the public about the history of the 2nd Armored Division.

Thirty-years later, members of the association continue the tradition of telling the story of American WWII veterans who

helped liberate Belgium through the restoring and displaying of military equipment and vehicles from the period of 1940 to 1945, participating in public memorials, parades and manifestations in authentic WWII paraphernalia, and providing WWII information and

history to the public so that future generations can learn to appreciate and understand the history of their country.

"This group and others like it are preserving the horrors of times past to educate the next generation in hopes that this chapter in our history is never

repeated," said Davis.

"The 2nd Armored Division helped liberate the location where we have our club," said Peters. "It's important for people to understand what the Americans did for us during WWII, especially now with the battles in Iraq. There are a lot

of people who demonstrate against the U.S., but, it's thanks to the U.S. soldier that these same people who are protesting have a house and a job."

To learn more about the Hell on Wheels Association visit their web site at www.ww2-vehicles-and-meetings.be.

Shooters club...from page 5

tective asset to the Roman Catholic Church and the police.

The church established shooting clubs as the official protectors of the church as a way to prevent the dessension and gain back the congregation's trust during a time when the church of Rome was being resisted.

Shooters Clubs were also used by police to perform certain supportive tasks such as serving as bailiffs.

Though they were not established for protective reasons, the voluntary help shooters club members provided to police soon became part of the clubs regulations in the 18th century, and vol-

untary protective tasks turned into official duties.

Today there are shooting clubs throughout the Limburg Province, and, while they are no longer used for protective reasons, the principle that they were founded upon - brotherhood, community spirit and friendly competition - still remain the same.

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